pt. 1

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THE EDMONTON CLAIM JUMPING

Perhaps you don't realize it, but there was a mighty hot time in Edmonton in 1882. I don't mean that the weather was especially warm that yearm, but I do mean that things were happening ~~mighty~~ fast and furious, for 1882 was the year that the claim jumping squabble took place.

Because of a sufiden increase of value in the Hudson's Bay Co. lots land in ~~the~~ embryo ~~xix~~ Edmonton took a boom. in 1882. I shall rely solely, tonight, on source accounts of this land fracus, since these accounts tell a most interesting tale. You must remember that Edmonton, in 1882 was, as a city in its infancy. Modern Edmonton started in 1871 when George McDougall the Pioneer Missionary staked a claim at Edmonton for the Methodist Missionary Society. No legal survey had, of course been made, and technically no land was actually open for homestead until surveyed. However, as you will see, a certain "good faith" philosophy regarding claim existed at Edmonton -- and while the claim jumpers ~~were~~ were perhaps technically legally right, they had little success when it come to a show-down.

CLAIM JUMPING

Frank Oliver, writing in
From the Edmonton Bulletin, February 11, 1882, said:

For some time past different parties have been casting a longing eye on a piece of property in town owned until recently by Mr. J. Sinclair. As the gentleman mentioned has never resided on it and had sold out his interest to ~~others~~ Mr. Anderson, it was supposed that any person who would jump it would have a good show for the title. The only building on it is occupied as a store by J. A. Macdonald and Company, who rented it from Mr. Sinclair previous to its being sold by him. Owing to the sudden rise in value of the Hudson's Bay Company lots, people here went land crazy and this particular property came to be valued at from five- to ten-thousand dollars.-- quite an inducement to at least try the experiment of jumping when the outlay need only be small. On Saturday last Mr. L. George, who has been in the employ of Mr. J. A. Macdonald of Villiers and Pearson for some time past, concluded (or was induced) to make the attempt. Why he did so is not very clear, as he, being an American citizen, is not entitled to the privileges of the homestead act and it was under cover of this act that the jump was to be made. At any rate, on Saturday morning he drove in his stakes at each side of the frontage of what is recognized as this property and put on a force of men to erect a small frame house 10 x 20 on the claim. The news caused considerable excitement, a good many thinking that the owners should not have been so careless about their property while

Mr. Ross's right to the land lies in the fact that he has for a number of years occupied the front part of the claim on which the church stands, and if he is to receive anything like 160 or 320 acres it must be taken from that claim. On the other hand, the church was the first occupant, Mr. Ross only occupies the claim from the high bank in front of the church to the end of the point, having the Hudson's Bay Company line on one side and the river on the greater part of the other, while the missionary society claim from the top of the hill back as far as the law will allow. Neither party has ever attempted to tkae possession of land occupied by the other, only making a verbal claim to it.

The plan offered by the jumpers is merely that the church had not received a title to the land, therefore it was open for homesteading. As a matter of fact, no land in this part of the Northwest is open for homesteading nor can it possibly be until it is surveyed.

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Regardless of such expression on the
Part of the Bulletin, however a certain
Mr. Bannerman did make the
attempt. He proceeded to build a
shanty on the church property, and
no sooner did he have the walls
erected than the watchful
Vigilance committee took
Oliver at their word, turned out
and tossed the Bannerman
shack into the River. Bannerman
was lucky not to have been
inside. The church retained its
property.

Incidently, the North Saskatchewan
had so many buildings tossed into
it, that it became known as
"the Vigilante depository".

The old sod church that
George McDougall built, is now
moved into a prominent place between
McDougall Church & Alberta College, where
it will look up its youthful
place again, in the community
life.

character and are a credit to this place , or would be to a much larger place, even now. The front part of both claims were fenced in -- that of the church as a graveyard, and of the mission house as a garden. From the time of the erection of the mission house up to the summer of '80, the resident missionary left and a mission school teacher occupied the premises, doing the double duty of minister and teacher up to the spring of '81 when he was removed to make room for a resident minister. The minister, however, did not arrive, and Mr. Hardisty who is one of the trustees of the church rented the mission house to Mr. M. McCauley in consideration of his repairing the fences and taking care of the property until a missionary should be appointed. Religious services were held in the church as occasion offered, and a sabbath school was kept up regularly. All this time the little graveyard around the church was receiving occupants.

That the missionary society had just claim to the land no one can deny -- they, in common with the rest of the settlers here, have not yet received the title, but this can make no difference in regard to the fact of their present possession. Of course the society not being a corporate body can not receive the title, but it is well known that if the land is to be alloted any certain person or persons may be incorporated to hold it for the society. That no such action has been taken is due doubtless to the fact hat there has been no prospect up to the present of an allotment being made, and beside the socity never supposed that any man or set of men existed who would try to steal a church or wish to sell a graveyard off in town lots.

Let those who wish to steal their neighbors' land bind themselves to secrecy by oath, but let those who wish to uphold right for right's sake, do so in broad daylight, challenging criticism from all quarters and relying only on the justice of their cause and their good right arms.

There was also an attempt late in February, 1882, to jump the claim held by the Methodist Mission, and in the Edmonton Bulletin for March 4, 1882, we find the following account:

Since the attempt last week to jump the Methodist Mission claim here, and the summary removal of the building which was being erected on it, the case has been discussed in all its bearings, the two principal points being the ownership of the whole property and the rights and wrongs of the erectors and removers of the shanty.

It appears that in '71, eleven years ago, the Reverand George McDougall established a Methodist Mission at this place and at the same time was the moving spirit in starting the settlement on which the village of Edmonton is now situated. The church property was nearly, if not quite, the first claim staked, and the land was plentiful. 200 yards frontage was accorded to it and a similar amount to the parsonage. A church costing about $3000. and a parsonage, costing perhaps, $1000. wherewithal being furnished partly by the Methodist missionary society, and partly by the people in the neighborhood, and partly in labor by Mr. McDougall and his family. Both buildings are of a substantial

It was decided at this meeting, that a Vigilance Committee should be organized and be a secret society since in this way it would give the members greater freedom of action in carrying out the objects of the society, leave them less liable to fall into the hands of the Philistines, make their decrees more feared, and give the society a better chance to act promptly and with effect, than if it were open so that all parties could keep themselves informed as to both its strength and weakness. On the other hand, a large proportion of the population who would be most enthusiastic in supporting any action against claim jumping would be hindered by the roles of the church to which they belonged. Another argument was that many others have a general distaste for going into anything that will not bear full daylight and among these are some of the principal men of the settlement. The meeting ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ decided that the society should henceforth be open, new members admitted by a three-forths vote of the members present, and that a standing committee of thirteen members, including the captain and two lieutenants, should have power to take action in cases where promptitude and secrecy were necessary, with the understanding that the whole society should back them.

While we deplore the necessity for the existence of a society which shall have for its object the taking of the law into its own hands, there is no doubt that the necessity for suhh a society exists. As the society proposed to take up and deal with cases in which the law will not give justice, public opinion to be the judge, so its actions should at all times, except in exceptional cases, be open to judgment of the same tribunal.

it completely. The balance of the building material, which was lying where the house had stood was thrown over the bank after it. The revolver was then handed back to Mr. George.

A deputation consisting of Messrs. Kippen, Gurneau and others then went to A. Macdonald and Company's store and demanded to know the intentions of the firm in regard to the property -- whether they intended to jump or not, and whether they intended to pay rent or not, adding the remark that if they intended to jump it they and their goods would be turned out insdie of five minutes. Mr. C. Stewart, on behalf of the firm, refused to answer, as he did not consider that the questioners had any right to ask. The deputation then left and the crowd dispersed.

Mr. C. Stewart left for Fort Saskatchewan in haste to demand the protection of the police. Captain Gagnon, Sergeant-Major Belcher, and four men arrived on Tuesday, but there had been no further demonstrations. A party of about a dozen men thoroughly armed kept watch in Macdonald and Company's store all night fearing an attack from the Vigilance Committee which was being formed.

When the George vs Sinclair rumpus was over, a meeting was announced for that evening in McDougall's Hall for the purpose of organizing a Vigilance Committee or Mutual Protection Society, and at the hour appointed about 100 persons were present.

render him all the assistance in their power. He replied that he did not want the building removed and did not intend to remove it and would shoot the first man who attempted to remove it. At the same time he produced a revolver and pointed it at those nearest him. The house had not been boarded up and George was standing just inside the studing while the crowd was close around him outside. Mr. D. R. Fraser slipped between the studing and seized George by the hands, and Mr. Henderson reached through and took the revolver from him. Some of the crowd also reached through and seized George trying to pull him out of the building, but as they were attempting to pull him through between different studs at the same time, they were not successful so he was allowed to remain. No further resistance was attempted and the carpenters who were at work were requested to pick up their tools and leave which they did. While they were waiting for ropes with which to draw the building away, an animated discussion was carried on between Messrs. Kippen, Fraser and others, and Mr. George, but neither party seemed to convince the other, and as the discussion got rather tame, and the rope was long in coming, some of the crowd began to build a fire by which to warm themselves while others began to tear down the building. At last the ropes came and the building was dragged straight ahead to the edge of the high bank overlooking the river, and about 200 feet above it. Mr. George remained in the building all the time until it came to the edge of the bank, when he politely stepped out at the back end. The crowd then turned and dragged it along the edge of the bank until it came on Colin Fraser's property, and after the tent and bedding were lifted out the house tumbed over, wrecking

others argued that if jumping was once started no man would be able to leave his claim for a moment without being in danger of losing it.

During the afternoon Messrs. Anderson, Kippen, and Wilson drove to the place, and Mr. Anderson forbade the carpenters to proceed with the work, and on being asked by what authority he did so said, "as proprietor". He also saw Mr. George and forbade him to proceed with the work on the same terms. Only the frame of the house was finished on Saturday, but Mr. George erected a tent in it and slept there that night. Nothing was done on Sunday but the air was full of rumors of other jumps to be made should this attempt succeed. The day, however, passed quietly and Mr. George again occupied the tent on Sunday night. Monday morning came and work was recommenced on the building, while the proprietors of the place began to cast about for some means of ejecting the intruder. Finding that the law gave them no means of doing so, they determined to use force. By this time the excitement had become intense and there was no difficulty in getting men willing to make this a test case and carry matters with as high a hand as might be necessary.

About four o'clock the crowds began to gather and in a few minutes 150 men were on the ground. There seemed to be no recognized leader, each man taking what part he thought fit. The proprietors then told Mr. George ~~the object of their coming~~ they had come to get him, and asked him to remove ~~the~~ his building from the premises within half an hour, adding that if he was unable to do so they were willing to